

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6379

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

USMISSION NATO

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CINCUSNAVEUR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VALLETTA 0977

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MT

SUBJECT: US POLICY TOWARD MALTA

REF: (A) VALLETTA 0326; (B) STATE A-5096, JULY 29, 1975

1. EMBASSY'S MOST RECENT ANNUAL POLICY ASSESSMENT, CONTAINED IN REF (A), HAS BEEN SENT TO ALL ADDRESSEES IN SEPTEL. REF (B), INVITING COMMENTS, SHOULD BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THAT ASSESSMENT. THIS MESSAGE CONTAINS ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THIS SUBJECT AND CURRENT STATUS REPORT AS SEEN FROM HERE.

2. AS INDICATED IN REF (B), AMBASSADOR SMITH RETURNED FROM WASHINGTON CONSULTATIONS VIA LONDON, WHERE HE BRIEFED BOTH EMBOFFS AND MR. HUGH MORGAN IN FCO ON THE QUESTIONS CONCERNING MALTA THAT WE HAD BEEN EXPLORING IN WASHINGTON. AMBASSADOR EMPHASIZED OUR DESIRE TO CONSULT CLOSELY WITH BRITISH ON THIS SUBJECT AND OUR RECOGNITION THAT OUR FUTURE POLICIES TOWARD MALTA WOULD HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED CONFIDENTIAL

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IN THE MUCH LARGER CONTEXT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN AS A WHOLE.

WE WERE OBVIOUSLY UNABLE TO EVALUATE MALTA'S IMPORTANCE TO NATO AND THE WEST WITHOUT CONSIDERABLE STUDY AND A LARGE MILITARY INPUT. WE HAD THEREFORE ALREADY ASKED DOD TO PROVIDE AN UPDATED COST ANALYSIS ASSESSMENT OF MALTA'S VALUE TO US. OUR GOAL WAS TO ATTEMPT TO ANTICIPATE MINTOFF

OR HIS POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR AS HE REACTS TO THE BRITISH WITHDRAWAL, TO CLARIFY OUR LONG-RANGE OBJECTIVES IN MALTA AND TO BEGIN SERIOUS THINKING NOW AS TO WHAT MIGHT BE DONE TO SAFEGUARD OUR INTERESTS HERE WHEN THE BRITISH PULL OUT. GIVEN MINTOFF'S PENCHANT FOR HIGHLY ERRATIC BEHAVIOR, IT WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY STRENGTHEN OUR HAND IN ANY FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS WITH HIM TO DECIDE NOW HOW IMPORTANT MALTA REALLY IS TO THE WEST AND, IF THE ANSWER IS CLEARLY AFFIRMATIVE, TO DETERMINE HOW MUCH, IF ANY, WE AND OTHER INTERESTED COUNTRIES WOULD BE WILLING TO PAY EITHER FOR ACCESS TO THE ISLAND OR TO EXCLUDE OUR ADVERSAIRES FROM IT.

3. MORGAN OF FCO SAID THAT HE WAS PLEASED TO LEARN THAT WE WERE ALREADY THINKING ALONG THESE LINES, THAT HE THOUGHT THE BRITISH SHOULD BE DOING THE SAME AND OFFERED TO STIMULATE A SIMILAR STUDY IN LONDON IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MOD. HE AGREED WITH THE AMBASSADOR THAT INFORMAL US-UK TALKS MIGHT ALSO BE USEFUL ONCE OUR RESPECTIVE STUDIES WERE COMPLETED AND THAT THESE COULD BE FOLLOWED BY CONSULTATIONS WITH THE ITALIANS AND WITH THE OTHER CONCERNED NATO STATES.

4. BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER HERE, WHO SEES THE SITUATION IN MALTA VERY MUCH AS WE DO AND HAS URGED LONDON TO UNDERTAKE A SIMILAR STUDY, HAS SUBSEQUENTLY CONFIRMED TO THE AMBASSADOR THAT LONDON IS NOW BEGINNING TO FOCUS ON THIS SUBJECT, WITH OCTOBER AS A TENTATIVE TARGET DATE FOR ITS COMPLETION. OUR HOPE IS THAT WE MIGHT DO THE SAME AND BE ABLE TO DISCUSS THE QUESTION IN SOME DEPTH WITH THE BRITISH BEFORE CONSULTATIONS WITH THE ITALIANS AND NATO. (IN DOING SO, WE AGREE WITH THE BRITISH THAT WE MUST OF COURSE AVOID GIVING THE ITALIANS THE IMPRESSION THAT WE ARE SOMEHOW GANGING UP ON THEM.)

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5. THE OPTIONS LISTED IN REF (B) ARE OF COURSE ONLY ILLUSTRATIVE AND FAR FROM EXHAUSTIVE. THE ITALIANS ATTACH GREAT IMPORTANCE TO CONTINUING EFFORTS TO RESTRAIN ANY FURTHER MALTESE DRIFT AWAY FROM THE WESTERN ORBIT, AND WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE BROAD HINTS THAT THEY WOULD NOT REFUSE IF ASKED TO ASSUME THE BRITISH ROLE HERE. HOW SUCH A PROPOSAL WOULD BE RECEIVED BY MINTOFF IS, OF COURSE,

THE KEY POINT. LIBYAN INTENTIONS ARE UNCLEAR, BUT THEY ARE VERY ACTIVE HERE, AND A HOSTILE MALTA--LINKED SOMEHOW IN AN ARRANGEMENT WITH THEM AND POSSIBLY, BY EXTENSION, TO THE RUSSIANS--WOULD CERTAINLY BE INIMICAL TO OUR OWN INTERESTS.

6. WE DO NOT PROFESS TO BE ABLE TO ANSWER FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS SUCH AS THE IMPORTANCE TO NATO OF ACCESS TO MALTESE DEFENSE FACILITIES OR OF DENYING THEM TO THE USSR. NOR CAN WE JUDGE HOW THE CURRENT UNSETTLED SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND THE NEW DANGERS TO NATO'S SOUTHERN FLANK WILL AFFECT OUR POSTURE HERE. WE CAN BE CERTAIN, HOWEVER, THAT MINTOFF WILL NOT HESITATE TO BARGAIN RUTHLESSLY IN ANY FUTURE NEGOTIATIONS, AND WE SHOULD THEREFORE GIVE SERIOUS THOUGHT NOW TO HOW IMPORTANT MALTA IS TO US AND THE WEST. FOR THESE REASONS, WE WOULD ALSO WELCOME COMMENTS FROM THE OTHER ADDRESSEES. SMITH

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